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practitioners?**

**Implications of a Bourdieusian perspective on the relation
between management research and management practice**

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Are practice-based approaches to strategy relevant to practitioners?

Implications of a Bourdieusian perspective on the relation between management research and management practice

‘It is hard to believe that rigorous research on what people really do in strategy does not have the potential for considerable practical value.’

(Johnson et al. 2007: 220)

Abstract

It has variously been argued that by focussing on ‘what people *do* in relation to strategy’ strategy research would become relevant to practitioners. This paper puts forth the argument that the gap between strategy research and management practice cannot be resolved just by paying more attention to what strategists really do. Drawing on a Bourdieusian perspective we argue that practice-based scholars who put forward such a view might lack an awareness for their necessarily ‘scholastic view’. This leads to two related fallacies: the fallacy of epistemic doxa (i.e. the unawareness of the scholastic logic) and the fallacy of scholastic ethnocentrism (i.e. the projection of the scholastic logic into the object of research). As a consequence, such research is in danger of producing knowledge that might neither be practically relevant nor even contribute to the advancement of management science. In order to avoid these fallacies researchers need to develop a particular kind of reflexivity by engaging in so-called ‘participant objectivation’. Research based on this reflexivity also has greater chances of having an impact on management praxis as it is likely to resonate with the practical logic of the practitioners. Yet, the actual transformation of academic

knowledge into practical knowledge has to be treated as the accomplishment of the practitioner, which is beyond the reach and control of the academic field.

I. Introduction

Over the last few years researchers have variously voiced concern about the insignificance of strategy research for managerial practice (Baldrige/Floyd/Markoczy 2004; Bettis 1991; Ghoshal/Moran 1996; Hafsi/Thomas 2005; Løwendahl/Revang 1998; Hodgkinson et al. 2001). In the existing literature the most frequently mentioned reasons for this lack of practical relevance are that research is not addressing the real problems of the practitioners (e.g. Rynes et al. 1999) and that research results do not get implemented (e.g. Van de Ven 2006). Practice-based approaches to strategy research, i.e. approaches that focus on the practice of strategy whether simply as phenomenon or as theoretical lens or even as ontology (Orlikowski forthcoming), are often presented as a direct response to these concerns (Johnson et al. 2003; 2007; Jarzabkowski/Balogun/Seidl 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010). Such practice-based studies typically seek to ‘bridge the gap [between scientific knowledge and lived reality] by engaging more deeply in the empirical details of organizational life on the ground’ (Orlikowski forthcoming: 3).

Practice-based scholars argue for a focus on a more micro-perspective on organizations in order to highlight the daily activities of organizational actors and the way they relate to strategic outcomes (Johnson et al. 2003). A practice-based approach to strategy research in this sense can be regarded as an attempt to get a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of what actually takes place in strategic planning, strategy implementation and other activities that deal with strategy (Whittington 1996; Johnson/Melin/Whittington 2003; Jarzabkowski/Balogun/Seidl 2007). The key concept for such an understanding is that strategic activities within an organisation are conceptualised as social practices that should enable re-

search to examine issues that are directly relevant to those who are dealing with strategy. By so doing, practice-based studies to strategy research promise to advance our theoretical understanding in a way that has practical relevance for managers and other organizational members (Golsorkhi et al. forthcoming).

By analysing the micro-activities of practitioners, their practices and how they relate to strategic outcomes, a practice perspective in strategy research reveals an adaptive and pragmatic understanding that cannot be apprehended in abstract models and theoretical propositions. Practice-based scholars therefore argue that by studying ‘what people *do* in relation to strategy’ (Johnson et al. 2007: 7; our emphasis) – rather than sticking to the abstract, macro-level approach that is typical of mainstream strategy research – strategy research would become (more or less directly) practically relevant. As Whittington writes: ‘It is hard to believe that rigorous research on what people ‘really do in strategy’ does not have the potential for considerable practical value’ (Johnson et al. 2007: 220). In this sense, practice perspectives in strategy research are expected to ‘help inform and guide those managers who steer the strategic course of an organization’ (Jarzabkowski/Wilson 2006: 348).

In this paper we discuss the claim of practice-based scholars that by focusing on the *activities* of practitioners, strategy research will become relevant to practitioners. For this purpose we will draw on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu as one of the main practice theorists – besides Giddens, deCerteau and Foucault – providing a conceptual framework that helps us to understand the essential structural features of strategy research that might be seen as the cause of the insignificance for managerial practice. His theory of social practices, in particular his concept of social fields (Bourdieu 1990a) and his concept of *skholè* (Bourdieu 1988) lend them-

selves particularly well to our research question for two reasons: First, Bourdieu himself already applied his practice theory to the field of science (Bourdieu 1988) and its relation to other areas of human activity (e.g. Bourdieu 1996a, 1996b, 2005). Second, practice-based scholars have themselves already widely drawn on Bourdieu's theory in their research on strategy (e.g. Chia/MacKay 2007; Jarzabkowski 2004; Gomez 2010). But as Chia (2004: 30) asserts: 'advocates of practice-based approaches to strategy research may have underestimated the radical implications of the work of social practice theorist such as Bourdieu [...] who they rely upon to justify this turn to practice.' In particular, practice-based strategy scholars so far have underestimated the implications of a Bourdieusian perspective on their relation to management praxis.

Drawing on Bourdieu we will argue that the gap between strategy research and management practice cannot be resolved simply by paying more attention to what strategists do. Rather, practice-based scholars who put forward such a view are likely to lack an awareness of their necessarily 'scholastic view' (Bourdieu 2001) and their abstractions of the object of research (Bourdieu 1998a). As a consequence, they are in danger of producing knowledge that might neither be practically relevant nor even contribute to the advancement of management science.

This paper is structured into seven sections. After this introduction, we will introduce in the second section Bourdieu's idea about the differentiation of social fields and his concept of *schol * as the main reason for the gap between management science and management praxis. The third and fourth sections will present two resulting fallacies from this differentiation – 'epistemic doxa' and 'scholastic ethnocentrism'. In the fifth section we will propose

Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity through 'participant objectivation' as a way of avoiding these two fallacies. In the sixth section we will show the possibilities for practical relevance despite the conflicting logics of strategy research and praxis. We conclude with the implications of the concepts for the relation of strategy research and praxis.

II. The differentiation of social fields and the concept of *skholè*

Bourdieu's sociological approach is based on a theoretical framework that consists of a set of multiple interrelated concepts; it is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive account of his work (for extensive reviews, see Fowler, 1997; Lane, 2000; Özbilgin/Tatli 2005). Despite the fact that Bourdieu's social theory calls for a relational view of practice that highlights the relation between his different concepts (Bourdieu 1998a), we will concentrate here on his ideas of social fields and of *skholé* (bracketing out his other theoretical concepts) as two concepts that will allow us to examine the relation between strategy research and strategy praxis without getting lost in the complexity of his work. In the following we will provide a brief introduction of his central theoretical ideas and then concentrate on specific findings in his studies on practice-based approaches to strategy.

Bourdieu viewed society as a complex set of interlinked fields and sub-fields (Bourdieu 1984, 1996a; Emirbayer/Williams 2005; Nahapiet/Goshal 1998; Swartz 2008; Golsorkhi et al. 2009). Even if fields have common structural features and general laws in relation to the way they work, they tend to refer to different social worlds like politics, economy and academia (Bourdieu 2002). We can thus speak of the field of science and fields of praxis more generally

and the sub-fields of practice-based approaches to strategy and managerial practice more specifically.

Both fields – strategy research and strategy praxis – share the same structural features: in every social field the interests of the social actors, their assumptions and their unconscious relation to their praxis shape the structure of the field. Yet, these structural features have different meanings in the different fields; fields are ruled by their own interests and specific assumptions (Bourdieu 1990a; Bouty/Gomez 2007; Golsorkhi et al.2010). As a consequence, practices within the field of management science are structured differently than practices within the field of managerial praxis.

While there are shared interests in different fields – for example the interest in education or money –, certain interests are field-specific. These field-specific interests are related to assumptions of what is at stake in the respective field. Thus, the stakes and interests considered to be of value are contingent and specific to each field. For each field the entirety of interests, assumptions and stakes will be different (Godard 2007; Bouty/Gomez 2007).

This implies that the scientific field presupposes and generates a specific form of interests – e.g. the search for truth – that is incommensurable with those of other fields of praxis (cf. Amabile et al. 2001; Barnes et al. 2002; Knight and Pettigrew 2007). Field members of practice-based approaches to strategy for example share the interest in scientifically studying the activities of strategists; thus, their research practices within this field relate to this very same interest.

All fields, whether academic or ‘practical’, give rise to specific forms of stakes and interests and, connected to that, a specific ‘illusio’, i.e. a tacit recognition of the value of the respective stakes and a belief in the respective interests (Bourdieu 2001). This means, interests and stakes are considered to be unconsciously shared among field members (Rasche/ Chia 2009). Practice-based scholars for instance believe in their scientific tools and methods to grasp what strategists really do in order to produce practically relevant knowledge from a scientific point of view. In this sense, these scholars’ practices (e.g. the production of scientific knowledge) are liable to an illusio that complies with different interests and require different stakes than practices in other fields. In the academic field in general the specific issue at stake is

‘the monopoly of scientific authority, defined inseparably as technical capacity and social power, or, to put it another way, the monopoly of scientific competence, in the sense of a particular agent’s socially recognised capacity to speak and act legitimately (i.e. in an authorised and authoritative way) in scientific matters.’
(Bourdieu 1975:19)

All scientific practices are directed towards the acquisition of scientific authority; they tend to share the same structure as they are produced and reproduced in relation to the stakes and interests that are specific to the academic field (Bourdieu 1990a). If practice-based approaches to strategy focus on the activities of strategists, their research practices are aimed at scientific authority towards other approaches to strategy rather than practical relevance. The practice of publishing in the field of practice-based approaches to strategy is an indicator of the scientific

authority (Kieser/Leiner 2009). Thus, scholars' main interest refers to receiving authority in the field of practice-based approaches by their number of publications and not by their degree of practical relevance.

Due to the structural feature of their *illusio* field members come up with a sense of the field; this sense enables scholars – as members of the academic field – to judge what is considered to be scientifically relevant in the academic field. Scholars of one field, e.g. the scientific field of practice based-approaches to strategy share a sense of the field that makes the practices of others meaningful and deemed appropriate by other participants in the field (Bourdieu 2001; Golsorkhi et al 2009). The competence to produce scientific knowledge is thus not an abstract competence, but a competence-in-practice embodied and enacted by a scholars practices in a particular field (Chia/MacKay 2007; Chia 2004).

The sense members of one field make of their reality is structured by the feature of 'doxa'; Field members' doxa allows the specific interests and stakes to be conceived as self-evident; this self-evidence of what structures a certain field relates to taken-for-granted assumptions specific to a field (Bourdieu 1998b). The doxa of practice approaches to strategy relates to the taken-for-granted assumption of producing practically relevant knowledge by focusing on the activities of strategists. Doxa therefore guides the field members' interpretation and their understanding of the world by excluding any practice that would 'go against the taken-for-granted assumptions that are naturalized' (Golsorkhi et. al 2009: 785). The naturalization of doxa renders the conditions of a field self-evident and therefore much easier to accept (Bourdieu 2004).

Due to the academics' doxa the structure of the scholars' practices and, thus, the conditions of the academic field is conceived of as natural and unquestioned. Consequently, scholars' practices are only considered appropriate to and legitimized in the academic field as long as they conform to the field-specific interests, illusion and doxa. Research that complies with the structures of the scientific field is likely to be recognised by other scientists as important and interesting, but not by practitioners or members of other fields. In other words, only knowledge that has been produced in the academic field, e.g. by conducting surveys that are based on scientifically approved methods, is acknowledged as scientific (cf. Kieser 2002; Kieser and Leiner 2009). The interests and stakes in the academic field owe their specificity to the fact that scholars cannot expect the value of their research to be recognised by anyone except other researchers. Only researchers are seen as qualified to assert scientific relevance; and this is also the most important criterion for reviews as well as for career decisions in the academic field (Judge et al. 2007; Macdonald/Kam 2007; Kieser and Wellstein 2007). This implies that research focusing on what strategists really do 'appeals to an authority outside the field [and therefore] cannot fail to incur discredit' (Bourdieu 1975: 23).

Scholars' practices are determined by the structure of the academic field. Besides the field-specific meanings of the structural features that shape the structure of the scientific field, Bourdieu points out what constitutes the scientific field: he insisted in the researcher's scholastic point of view as condition of the possibility of science (Bourdieu 1988). Due to the scholastic point of view scientific knowledge differs significantly from practical knowledge (Chia/MacKay 2007).

For Bourdieu, all knowledge produced in the academic field is structured in the same, so-called ‘scholastic’ way. This can even be seen in the particular use of language:

‘Instead of grasping and mobilizing the meaning of a word that is immediately compatible with the situation, we mobilize and examine all the possible meanings of that word, outside of any reference to the situation. [...] The scholastic view is a very peculiar point of view on the social world, on language, on any possible object of thought.’ (Bourdieu 1998b: 127)

The word ‘strategy’ for instance is often conceptualised by practice-based scholars in an abstract or scholastic way (Jarzabkowski/Balogun/Seidl 2007); this conceptualization cannot grasp the meaning that ‘strategy’ might obtain in a practical situation (Paroutis and Heraclous 2010).

The ‘scholastic view’ of the world derives from the concept of ‘skholè’ giving rise to an abstraction from or distance to praxis (Bourdieu 1988; Chia/MacKay 2007). The scholastic view implies a distance to the ‘praxis’ itself – ‘an abstraction of the world to think about the world’ (Bourdieu/ Wacquant 1992: 78). This abstraction is a social distance whose principle lies in the difference between the social conditions of the academic field and those of praxis. The conditions for the possibility of science consist in the scholar’s leisure of intellectual work (skholè) – in contrast to the actor’s (in our case: manager’s) time pressure and pressure to act as conditions of ‘praxis’. That is to say, they consist in the neutralization of practical urgencies – such as the ability to identify problems for the sole pleasure of resolving them and not

because they are posed by the necessities of life (Bourdieu 2001; Brown/Duguid 1991). Kimberly in this sense argues:

‘[R]esearchers have a set of skills and competencies that well serve the research community but that do not easily and naturally transfer into settings that demand effective, clientoriented problem-solving skills’ (Kimberly 2007: 144).

Based on their *skholé*, practice-based researchers are detached from praxis because they are placed outside the urgency of the managers’ practical situations. In other words, the practice-based researcher is distanced from managerial praxis due to his or her scholastic point of view. This implies that knowledge produced in the academic field does not meet the conditions of praxis and therefore cannot apply to the logic of praxis (Chia/MacKay 2007; Chia 2004; Chia/Holt 2006). At the same time, however, practice can *only* be understood from a position outside the field in which the action is played out. Kimberly remarks that the

‘craft of research heavily depends on the ability of the researcher to maintain a certain degree of cognitive and emotional distance from the phenomena being examined’ (Kimberly 2007: 143).

Ironically, the scholastic view, on the one hand, enables scientific knowledge and, on the other hand, is – because of its distance to praxis – opposed to praxis. Because scientific

knowledge aims at universality and timelessness it erases many conditions that are necessary to practical enactment (Golsorkhi et al. 2009).

Scholars of practice-based approaches to strategy in this sense refer to their scholastic view by looking at ‘what people do in relation to strategy’ – as the condition for the possibility of this kind of research. It is through their scholastic view that they grasp strategy praxis. By constructing managerial practice from a scholastic point of view, practice-based scholars necessarily distance themselves from ‘what people do in relation to strategy’ and thus from the practical logic of strategists. The differing logics refer to differences in defining and tackling problems that prevail in the field of practice-approaches to strategy and the field of managerial praxis.

The difference between strategy research and strategy praxis – and thus between the observer and the observed – lies in the relationship between knowing and doing; between the logical logic of science and the logic of praxis. The production of scientific knowledge is thus based on a logic specific to the academic field – in contrast to the logic of praxis.

‘Real mastery of this logic is only possible for someone who is completely mastered by it, who possesses it, but so much so that he is totally possessed by it, in other words depossessed.’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 14)

The scholastic view of practice-based scholars in the academic field is determined by the particular social conditions of the possibility for producing scientific knowledge and thoughts (Bourdieu 1990b). The logic of the scholastic view is conflicting with the logic of practice; and at the same time the condition sine qua non for the existence of the academic field. Due to their doxa scholars contribute to the reproduction of these opposing logics – even though mostly unintentionally (Gomez/Bouty 2007; Rasche/Chia 2008; Golsorkhi et al. 2009). The production of scientific knowledge – like all other academic practices – is thus determined by the social logic of the academic field. Therefore, practice-based approaches to strategy – guided by the structures of the academic field – can be expected, first of all, to produce scientifically relevant knowledge; whether that knowledge is also practically relevant is an entirely different question.

III. The fallacy of epistemic doxa

For Bourdieu the implications of the scholastic view have always been of central concern (Bourdieu 2004; Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992). As he pointed out, the scholastic view tends to result in research that is disconnected from everyday practice and directed solely at other researchers. This is a consequence of leaving unexamined the determinations inherent in the scholastic view itself. These determinations consist in

‘the observer’s relation to the social world, and therefore [in] the social relation which makes observation possible, [because it] is made the basis of the practice analysed, through the representations constructed to account for it (rules, models, etc.). This projection of non-objectified theoretical relationship into the practice

that one is trying to objectify is at the root of a set of interlinked scientific errors. So it is [...] in order to meet the most practical requirements of scientific practice, that we must make an analysis of the specific logic and the social conditions of possibility of scientific knowledge [...]. This will also be, inseparably, an analysis of the specific logic of practical knowledge.’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 29)

Most researchers are unaware of their scholastic view and their corresponding abstractions from ‘praxis’ due to the doxa of academics (Bourdieu 2004; Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992). This doxa renders scholars’ interpretation and understanding of the world that are acquired through an academic or scholastic experience self evident (Gomez/Bouty 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2009). The fallacy of ‘epistemic doxa’ (Bourdieu 1998a: 215) implies that scholars usually do not realize the effect on their research of being unavoidably ‘placed outside of the object [and] observe it from a far and from above’ (Wacquant 1989: 37). Scholars tend to display their doxa as they overlook the social presuppositions inscribed in the scholastic point of view (Bourdieu 1998a; Golsorkhi et al. 2009). That is, they leave unquestioned the taken-for-granted assumptions of their thoughts and thus, the social conditions of the possibility of the scholastic point of view.

This epistemic doxa is also apparent in some of the practice-based approaches to strategy when researchers assume that their deep engagement with ‘what people do in relation to strategy’ automatically results in an understanding of strategizing praxis. Due to their scholastic view, scholars are necessarily distanced from the reality of the strategy practitioner. As long as they do not consider their own scientific logic and the social conditions of the possibility of their research they cannot gain an understanding of the logic of the practice they are studying.

In other words, if practice-based scholars do not adopt the epistemological stance of being aware of the taken-for-granted assumptions of their scholastic view – that is to say their interest in scientific authority rather than practical relevance –, they give way to an epistemic doxa.

If practice perspectives are primarily concerned with social practices of strategists, a reflection on the doxa of these approaches has to be conducted. For Bourdieu, the logic of strategists' practices can only be understood through the awareness of the own cognitive constructions that are related to this doxa. As Bourdieu explains:

‘The logic in which I reason is [...] that of epistemological questioning. This is a fundamental epistemological question since it bears on the epistemic posture itself, on the presuppositions inscribed in the fact of thinking the world, of retiring from the world and from action in the world in order to think that action. What we want to know is in what ways this withdrawal, this abstraction, this retreat impact on the thought that they make possible and thereby on what we think.’ (Bourdieu 1998b: 129).

The scholastic point of view requires an abstraction from the activity of practitioners. This abstraction unconsciously determines the scholar's thoughts about practitioners. It is the academics' doxa that makes scholars ignore the abstraction from praxis and to commit to the fal-

lacy of ‘epistemic doxa’. Accordingly, practice-based scholars of strategy might be misled in their assumption that by studying the practices of strategists they would gain an authentic understanding of that practice. Instead, they need to reflect on their own doxa to understand that their ‘understanding’ of strategizing practice is shaped by the logic of the academic field which is fundamentally different from the logic of strategizing practice.

IV. The fallacy of scholastic ethnocentrism

Apart from the epistemic doxa, i.e. the unawareness of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the scholastic view, the abstraction from ‘praxis’ may also result in a second scholastic fallacy, called ‘scholastic ethnocentrism’ (Bourdieu 2000: 50). Researchers tend to fall for scholastic ethnocentrism to the extent that they fail to analyse the scholastic point of view that they adopt towards their objects, i.e. the gap between their own social conditions and those which underlie the practices they are analysing (Bourdieu 2004; Wacquant 1989). Practice research on strategy is confronted with a difference between two socially constructed modes of construction and comprehension of the world: the scholastic one which they, due to their doxa, tacitly set up as the norm of any practice and the practical one which a researcher has

‘in common with men and women seemingly very distant from him in time and social space, and in which he cannot recognise the practical mode of knowledge [...] which is also his own in the most ordinary acts and experiences of ordinary existence. Scholastic ethnocentrism leads [...] to cancel out the specificity of practical

logic [...] by assimilating it to scholastic knowledge, but in a way that is fictitious and purely theoretical (without practical consequences).’ (Bourdieu 2000: 51)

Practice-based scholars therefore tend to impute into their objects of research social aspects that in fact are just a result of their particular way of observing them (Golsorkhi et al. 2009). By projecting their scholastic thinking into the heads of strategists, scholars look at strategists’ practices as if they were thinking in the same scholastic way. In this sense scholars operate as if their scientific concepts that they draw on in order to explain the activities of practitioners, were the actual cause of these activities. As Bourdieu explains:

‘In my view, one of the chief sources of error in the social sciences resides in an uncontrolled relation to the object which results in the projection of this relation into the object. What distresses me when I read some works by sociologists is that people whose profession it is to objectivize prove so rarely able to objectivize themselves and fail so often to realize that what their apparently scientific discourse talks about is not the object but their relation to the object – it expresses resentment, envy, social concupiscence, unconscious aspirations or fascinations, hatred, a whole range of unanalyzed experiences of and feelings about the social world.’ (Wacquant 1989: 33)

By focusing exclusively on the activities of practitioners, practice-based approaches are often stuck in their scholastic view on practitioners. Thus, scholars project into practices their unexamined social relation to praxis. Although scholars as well as practitioners have social relations to praxis, they refer to different logics by practising these relations. Just like scholars

constructing a framework to conceptualize ‘strategists as practitioners’ that is far apart from strategists who – for instance – must solve the very practical and urgent problem of implementing a strategic plan in their firm. Scholars who study the activities of practitioners often even have a completely different understanding of the word ‘strategy’ than the practitioners possess themselves (Chia/ Holt 2009). If practice-based researchers look at what strategists do, they refer to their scholastic view and thus to their theoretical logic of ‘objectivizing’ what strategists do. This does not mean however that these scholars should aim at adopting the practical logic for themselves.

‘This critical reflection on the limits of scientific knowledge is not intended to discredit scientific knowledge in one or another of its forms and, as it is often attempted to set at its place a more or less idealized practical knowledge; but rather to give it a solid basis by freeing it from the distortions arising from the epistemological and social conditions of its production. [...] it aims simply to bring to light the theory of practice which scientific knowledge implicitly applies and so to make possible a truly scientific knowledge of practice and of the practical mode of knowledge.’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 27)

Practice-based research is at risk of falling for the fallacy of scholastic ethnocentrism, first, due to the epistemic doxa – their lack of awareness of their own scholastic assumptions on the activities of practitioners; and second, due to the fact that they impute this scholastic view to their objects of research. They are subject to these errors as long as they are not aware of their own relation to the academic field (Bourdieu 2004). In other words, to gain insights into what

‘strategists really do’ implies an awareness of one’s own assumptions and the conditions under which they appeared.

We can summarize, research that falls prey to the fallacies of epistemic doxa and scholastic ethnocentrism risk neither to produce results that are of relevance to practitioners nor advance academic knowledge. In the following we will discuss a particular form of academic reflexivity and the so-called ‘participant objectivation’ as means for avoiding the risk of these two fallacies.

V. Reflexivity and participant objectivation as means against scholastic fallacies

Bourdieu emphasized the need for a reflexive turn of the researcher as a prerequisite of any research on practice and the condition of scientific progress (Wacquant 1989). A genuinely reflexive approach can avoid the scholastic fallacies and the associated determinations that researchers are liable to. As Bourdieu explains:

‘I believe that if the sociology I propose differs in any significant way from the other sociologies of the past and of the present, it is above all in that it continually turns back onto itself the scientific weapons it produces. It is fundamentally reflexive in that it uses the knowledge it gains of the social determinations that may bear upon it, [...] in an attempt to master and neutralize their effects. Far from undermining the foundations of social science, the sociology of the social determinants of

sociological practice is the only possible ground for a possible freedom from these determinations.’ (Wacquant 1989: 55)

If practice-based scholars want to avoid these determinations resulting from their scholastic view they need to take a genuinely reflexive perspective. This perspective cannot be reduced to simple self-reference or self-consciousness. Since all practices are the consequences of the social conditioning, this implies that one should acknowledge how the abstraction of the organisational practice influences our thinking as scholars. For Bourdieu scientific research is only truly reflexive to the extent that scholars understand, first, the logic of their own activities they, as social scientists, engage in and, second, the practical logic, of the social practices they study (Bourdieu 1998a, 2001); in other words, this means, to adapt the distinction between the scholastic mode of knowledge and the practical mode of knowledge to research. Reflexivity, here, is twofold: reflexive distinction requires on the one hand a critical understanding of the scholastic conditions that make this differentiation possible (Bourdieu 1990a; Lewandowski 2000). And on the other hand, with the purpose of becoming aware of one’s own scholastic position in the academic field, it is necessary to reflect on the conditions of the possibility to take this position (Bourdieu 1988, 1990b; Golsorkhi et al. 2009).

By observing the difference between the academic field and the field of management practice, scholars can conceptualise the logic of the practitioners in the observed field. To do this, the researcher has to observe the everyday practice

‘with a scientific thought that is aware of itself and its limits to be capable of thinking practice without destroying its object. It is thus to understand what kind of understanding the scholastic thought has of this practical understanding and the difference between practical and scientific knowledge.’ (Bourdieu 2000: 50)

Scholars adopting a practice perspective on strategy, who know what defines them as such from the scholastic point of view, realise the limits that underlie their positions in the field. Reflexivity primarily relates to their own scholastic point of view in order to avoid the scholastic fallacies and their effects. By being reflexive they can avoid the epistemic doxa and the scholastic ethnocentrism: scholars become aware of their scholastic mode of knowledge and are prevented from imputing this mode of knowledge to the strategists in organizations. In addition they become aware of current presuppositions that constitute their doxa. Only if practice-based scholars reflect on the practical logic of their social practices as scholars they are able to grasp the practitioners’ logic of practice. However, scholars taking a reflexive position bear a risk of ‘[...] falling into a form of scholastic illusion of the omnipotence of thought if one were to believe it possible to take an absolute point of view of one’s own point of view’ (Bourdieu 2001: 119). In other words, researchers cannot simulate practitioners by being reflexive.

The way in which such a twofold reflexivity is achieved, is via ‘participant objectivation’ (Bourdieu 1978; 1990c; 2003). Participant objectivation incorporates the scholastic point of view into social analysis in the attempt ‘to render explicit what is taken for granted’ (Bourdieu/ Wacquant 1992: 68). The reflexive turn is a principle that enables the re-

searcher to construct scientific objects into which the relation of the researcher to the object is not unconsciously projected (Golsorkhi et al. 2009).

In order to make explicit what is taken for granted, practice-based scholars need to objectify the object of research and the subjective relation to this object (Bourdieu 1988). What must be objectivized is not the individual who does the research but the position the researcher occupies in the academic field and the fallacies implicated in the stance the researcher takes by virtue of not being a practitioner.

‘This is to say, in passing, that the kind of "sociology of sociology" that I advocate has little in common with this kind of complacent and intimist return upon the private person of the sociologist or with a search for the intellectual *Zeitgeist* that animates his or her work [...] or yet with this self-fascinated, and a bit complacent, observation of the observer's writings which has recently become something of a fad among [...] anthropologists [...] who, having become blase with fieldwork, turn to talking about themselves rather than about their object of research.’ (Bourdieu 1988: 65)

To be reflexive and thus the way to produce valid research results that might be of practical relevance is to engage in the perspective of participant objectivation. This perspective should be adopted in order to be aware of the ‘*illusio*’ and ‘*doxa*’ not only of the academic field but also of the particular field that one is studying. Practice-based researchers

should therefore account for the way actors make sense of the world as well as the way they perceive the field to which they belong (Golsorkhi et al. 2009).

Reflexivity in this sense has to consist of a

‘[...] process of objectivation of the subject of objectivation, which uses all the instruments of inquiry a discipline has to offer to enlarge the knowledge of those who are its specialists and thus to aim at an improvement of the way they practice.’
(Bourdieu 1988: 67)

There are several studies adopting a reflexive perspective in their research (Gherardi/Nicolini/Strati 2007; Chia/Holt 2009; Whittington 2003; Tsoukas 2005), but they mostly tend not go far enough in their reflexive approaches; a genuinely reflexive practice perspective on strategy research moreover requires a reflection on scientific research as practice (Grand/Rüegg-Stürm/von Arx 2008). As Rasche and Chia note:

‘As researchers it is vital that substantial consideration is given to the manner in which accounts and explanations proffered on strategy practice are reflexively moderated by an acute awareness of the inherent problems relating to the ‘situatedness’ of strategic action and hence the epistemological issues associated with such attempted representations. The manner in which academically articulated accounts of strategy practice tend to create a schism between such accounts and the very practices they purport to explain is one of the most intractable problems of the re-

search process. Such a schism can only be addressed and rectified through a careful examination of the dominant research dispositions and the nature and limitations of the resultant explanatory outcomes involved.’ (Rasche/Chia 2008: 3)

A process of objectivation intends to explicate the integration of the researcher in the social space as well as the integration of the researcher in his or her specific field of scientific production. Participant objectivation means analysing one’s own relation to the object of research and insisting on the social conditions that act as boundaries within which knowledge becomes possible. Participant objectivation requires resisting taking up the absolute point of view upon the object of study that is inherent in the scholastic point of view (Bourdieu 1978, 2003; Golsorkhi et al. 2009; Byrne 2005). It is moreover not simply about participating in the fields of praxis, but about the reflexivity of the scholastic distance to the object of research. This includes the understanding of the own logic as an observer as well as the scientific techniques and models the researcher uses to construct his or her object (Bourdieu 2000).

By examining the object of research and one’s own relation to the object, it is possible to differentiate between the academic field itself and the field that is being studied with the aim of becoming aware and understand the different conditions of these fields. In other words, the production and progress of scientific knowledge requires an understanding of the logic of the academic field – i.e. a practice-based scholar’s own scholastic view and the conditions under which this view appears – in order to understand how it differs from the logic of practice. This is only possible to the extent that practice-based approaches to strategy adopt a reflexive perspective by engaging in the process of participant objectiva-

tion. This reflexivity enables the reconstruction of their knowledge by including the distance between practical logic and theoretical logic. Reflexivity through participant objectivation is crucial to any analysis of strategists' activities that aims to be not only academically but also practically relevant.

VI. Possibilities of practical relevance in face of the conflicting logics of strategy research and praxis

If we accept the claim that strategy research and strategy praxis constitute separate fields with different logics, the possibilities for research results to become practically relevant appear quite restricted – even if researchers are aware of the difference in logics. Yet, as Bourdieu (1996a) pointed out, it would constitute another scholastic fallacy to deny any potential impact of scientific results on management praxis. Academic practices, even though they belong to a particular field, cannot be treated as isolated from practices in other field. That is to say, academic practices might – voluntarily or involuntarily – have effects on the practices in other fields. As we will discuss in the following, the chances of such effects can be actively influenced by the researchers.

Research papers often display (sometimes very elaborate) sections on the practical relevance of their respective studies (Bartunek 2007; Bartunek/Rynes 2010). Yet, the presented practical implications are typically described from the perspective of the

researchers (Kieser/Leiner 2009; Nicolai/Seidl forthcoming). That is to say, the authors construct the practical implications for practitioners from their own scholastic point of view, which is then reviewed and evaluated by other researchers – rather than by practitioners themselves. Thereby, researchers just try to convince other researchers (not practitioners) about the practical relevance of their papers (Mohrman et al. 2001). Hence, recent attempts by journal editors to increase the practical relevance of management research by emphasising practical relevance as a criterion for reviewing and accepting papers for publication follows the same logic and is unlikely to change the situation (Zell 2001; Kieser/Leiner 2009).

Beyond the academic construction of practical relevance, ‘real’ practical relevance presupposes that the research results are enacted in the practices of managers in their everyday praxis (Peltz 1978; Nicolai/Seidl forthcoming). In order for this to happen, practitioners have to be able to translate and integrate the research results into their concrete work practices. That is to say, the presentation of research results has to resonate with the logic of management practices. Researchers can increase the chances of their research having an impact on practice by simulating the context and logic of management praxis. This is probably also what Bartunek and Rynes had in mind when they write:

‘The point is not so much that managers or other practitioners should immediately implement [...] suggestions [put forward by the academics in their papers], but rather that it is important for academics to keep potential end-users in mind in our research conversations. Even research translations will be more effective if the original researchers, who are deeply involved in their areas of research, devote

some effort to thinking about how their research might be used [...].’ (Bartunek and Rynes 2010: 114)

This, however, is only possible if the researchers are aware about the differences between the logics of the two fields involved, i.e. by displaying real reflexivity about their research and by engaging in participant objectivation. Only research reflecting on the abstraction to praxis is able to understand the logic of praxis and hence to shape the presentation of results in a way that it might resonate with the logic of management praxis. In this sense practice-based studies on what people do ‘have effects; they make differences [...] and they can help to bring into being what they also discover’ (Law/Urry2004: 393).

While researchers might be able to increase the likelihood for their results to be picked up by practitioners, they have no influence on the way in which the results will be changed and adapted to the conditions and logics of the management field. In order for academic knowledge to be useful to the practitioner, he or she has to change it in such a way as to appear useful and appropriate by other practitioners in their specific field. As the adaption of scientific results to the logic of the field of management practice is beyond the research of the academic field, the particular practical relevance of scientific knowledge is ultimately the product of the practitioner, i.e. it is ultimately left to the practitioner to determine the particular way in which his or her practice is affected by it (Seidl 2007). As a consequence, this knowledge no longer constitutes scientific knowledge, but has become a different kind of knowledge – practical knowledge.

VII. Conclusion

We started this paper with the claim by practice-based scholars that an engagement with the concrete activities of strategy practitioners would (more or less directly) increase the practical relevance of strategy research. Drawing on Bourdieu as one of the main proponents of practice theory who is widely used by practice-based strategy scholars themselves, we argued that this claim is somewhat problematic as it does not take into account the particular conditions under which academic knowledge is produced. From a Bourdieusian perspective the lack of practical relevance generally has to be understood not as a deficiency of the particular research but as an inevitable consequence of the difference in the logics between the academic field and the field of management praxis.

We showed that the differentiation between the field of management science and of management praxis, and consequently the gap between strategy research and strategy praxis has to be appreciated as constitutive for the production and progress of strategy research. If practice-based research were directly relevant to management praxis, it would no longer constitute a science but simply be another form of management praxis (Seidl 2009; Nicolai/Seidl forthcoming; Kieser 2007). If strategy research loses its distance to its research objects, for example by trying to produce directly applicable practical solutions, it would lose the authority to judge research quality and no longer be able to fulfil the function of scientific progress (Kimberly 2007; Kieser/Leiner 2009).

Against this background, practice-based approaches appear particularly demanding as they presuppose that the researcher reconstructs (through reflection by participant objectivation) both the logic of his or her own academic field (and its associated scholastic view) and the logic of the field of management praxis. Otherwise the researcher is at risk of falling for the fallacies of epistemic doxa (i.e. the unawareness of the scholastic logic) and scholastic ethnocentrism (i.e. the projection of the scholastic logic into the object of research). This would result in research that is neither practically nor scientifically relevant.

Finally we argued that practice-based research might prove practically relevant despite the differentiation between the field of management science and management practice. Yet, rather than transferring any scientific knowledge into management practice as is often assumed (Nicolai 2004), practical relevance has to be conceived of as a process involving the active contribution of the practitioner. Only the practitioners themselves can transform academic knowledge into practical knowledge by adjusting and shaping it according to the concrete conditions of their particular field. The researcher can merely increase the chances of his or her academic knowledge to be picked up by ensuring some kind of resonance with the logic of the field of management praxis.

Overall, this paper makes two contributions: First, it contributes to the practice-based research on strategy by discussing and extending its central claim to increase the practical relevance of strategy research by focussing on ‘what practitioners really do’. We show that this claim is highly problematic as it stands. We point out particular fallacies of such a view and show how this line of strategy research can be fruitfully advanced. Second, we

contribute to the growing literature on the rigour relevance argument in management science by developing a new perspective on that debate. Based on Bourdieu, we identify particular conditions under which research results can be expected to become practically relevant.

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